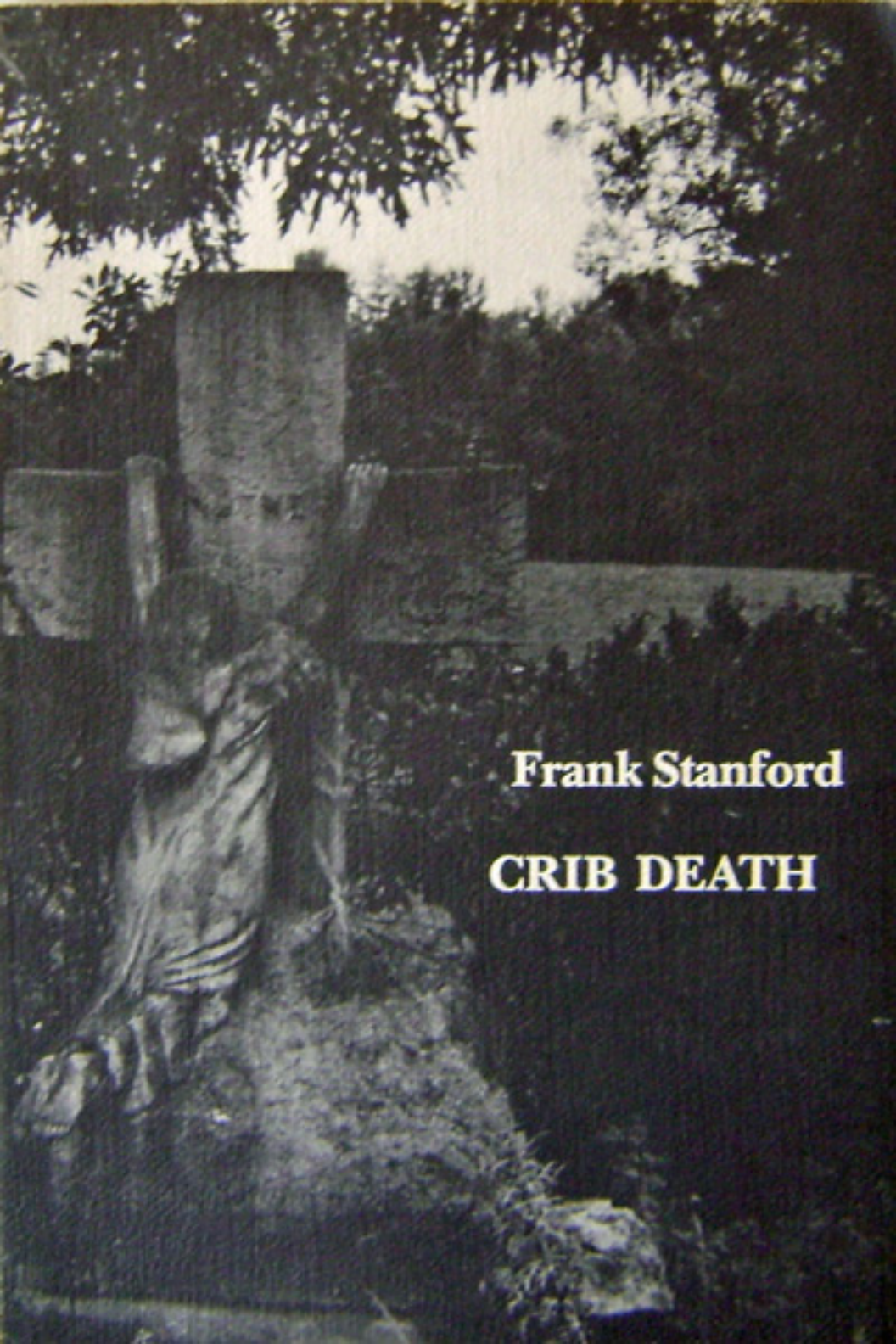
Frank Stanford
CRIB DEATH

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CRIB DEATH

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For The Dead: Pier Paolo Pasolini & Rahshann Roland Kirk
And the Living: Muhammad Ali & Pharaoh Saunders

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AMARANTH

AMARANTH

There are no starfish in the sky tonight,
But there is one below your belly,
And there are cold evenings in your eyes.

If I could get to your house
I would look under the bed of your childhood,
The tongueless loafer without laces or eyes,
The cave of your young foot
With its odor of moon, its dampness
Coming from underground, your shoe
Which also bled and is now and island.

You have to remember these are the memories
Of a survivor, you have to remember.

You could be looking for clay to haul away,
Fill for the deep washouts of your love.
All your old loves, they bled to death, too.

Your hair is like a cemetery full of hands,
Fingers in the moonlight.

When you come down to the heart
Bring your post-hole diggers and crowbar.
Do not set a corner, a fence won't last.
Do not bury our first child there,
Or set a post,
Although I have tasted blood on the lips of a stranger,
At night and in the run.

A WOMAN DRIVING A STAKE INTO THE GROUND AT MIDNIGHT

God, I have not forgotten you
For sending all my children into your old ice boxes.

I remember that goat
You let them follow with a compass,
Those wooden wheels you let them roll
And break their first silence on.

I watched those beautiful kites you let them glide,
Their hearts all balls of string.

When they were young and unfucked
And old friends with the moon
Spreading its cream over their lips
As they slept, you came in
The window with the light
Like a cat on their necks.

You leave
When you want, the dark honey
Of their breath you store
In the catacombs of your lungs.

Alone and licked, their dreams
All rat-bitten and full of fever,
They remember your words,
Droppings on the white sheets.

Where are the dead?
In my arms, their panties pulled high,
Their eyes and teeth all small and even.

I remember your sadness, too.
A pan of wash water.
I threw it out in the chicken yard each evening.

I wanted my love to be an orchard,
Rows of thornless berries.

I wanted my love
To be death for the suffering.

Like you, I knew a woman once.
She was carrying a child.
One night she cut it
Out like a vine
With her husband's razor.

I didn't want you
To forget my love
Is a dark and rotten fruit on the ground,
A deathbed for your dreams,
And I don't know you, now,
Your sadness or your mark
On everything we bury.

TAKING YOUR LIFE

The man's tongue laid down beside him when he slept.
The man did not know it.
He thought his tongue was safe and quiet
In the pillow of his mouth.
The man thought his tongue was his wife.

The man did not know his tongue
Dreamed of touching others,
Longing with pain, moaning with pleasure.

One night the man woke and had no voice.
He felt his mouth, saw that his tongue was gone.

He went through the bars looking for his tongue.
He wanted to drink, but he couldn't.
He wanted to sing, but he couldn't.
He envied the musicians.
He heard his tongue was with another.

He went home, sad and imaginary
With desire.
He dreamed he was a musician,
That his tongue heard him one night,
Fell in love with him,
Came back to live in his mouth.

This was a dream.

His own tongue, the soft root of his death.
It would fly
Out of its lair, light in a tree,
Cast its own shadow on the man.

The man with no voice, no lovers.

STRANGE ROADS BEFORE LIGHT

At midnight I am alone
And my love is with someone else.
The moon is like a woman in a red dress
Standing on the beach.

I listened all evening.

All I heard was a one-legged boy
Looking for his coon dog.
He was looking at the moon, too.
It was like a plate with no supper.

And a route salesman in a saloon
Was looking at the moon.
It was a clock with twelve numbers,
But he had no arms to hold her.

And the child who was supposed to be
Practicing the piano
Was looking at the moon.
He was already thinking of a woman.
He wanted to sleep beside her,
Not with her. Odd, but not bad,
He thought the moon spilt the key to her room.

The woman blowing smoke in the dark,
Her fingers looking for the ashtray,
She thought the moon
Was a piece of stationery
In a drawer she would not open.
She would have written there was no moon,
That I am screwing somebody else,
Trying to remember your telephone number.

LOST RECIPE

The water boiling rabbits and onions
Fogs up the windows of my house:

Why does this old fat woman
Let me come around here,
Drawing long words on her glass.

A woodwind solo,
She keeps putting those empty blue bottles on her sill,
Living alone in the woods
Like a spayed stray.

She reads her twenty-pound bible
Full of secret ancestors
And the recipes of youth and luck,
While I lick plates
And grind out the ice cream.

When I open my closet
Dust blows in my washed hair.

Birds have nested in the cast iron.

That hook of hers, like a slab
Of cured bacon, words carved in meat
Smelling like hickory.

Water that is boiling to disinfect sickness
And scald hogs.

Water boiling in the locomotive,
Hauling its full cargo of death and soybeans,
Like windows bending in a storm.

A burning tree.

The matinee postponed due to lightning.
A long-lost cousin making good.

I buried the after- birth in the sawdust
On the floor of the barn.
And sometimes, when winter becomes
Such a deadly shot, I push away my supper.

Men go out at night, trying to sweep up the stars.

And women grow weary of the cold weather in their men.

They need a friend on the lake with a sailboat.
They need to take medicine and be alone.

Bad food and dead children are not forgotten.
They smell like cod liver oil
In a thimble on the fingers-
A fat lady in a housecoat
Walking through rooms with a cage,
Calling a bird.

THE ANGEL OF DEATH

I told him he better watch his step.
He asked me what I was doing,
Sleeping in the middle of the road.

I said I was an orphan.
See these suspenders?
They hold up my pants.
I sleep where I please, says I.
My pillows come from the best roosters.

The moon went back into its night
Like a blue channel cat in a log.

The man cast no shadow.

My shoes wore out
Like a thousand years in the desert.

There was a snow drift in my heart,
And in the broken mountains of the South
The smoke rose
Wet on the edge with blood.

I am getting out of here, I told the man.

He spit a fish bone on the ground.
He took off his glove.
He laid it on the bone.

What I wanted to do was run.

The moon beat like bait on a black hook.
Then there was a new fish
Sucking wind in the road.

Take off your pants, he said.
He had an egg in his hand.

Anything for the angel of death.

KNEW IT WAS LOVE, FELT IT WAS GLORY
after Pier Paolo Pasolini

Here is where we went out in the boats, listening
For the dogs and children, for the girl laughing
When she lifts her dress, for the open casket,
Strolling through the wet libraries of moonlight

You could smell horses, some kind of flowers.

This is the way it was before they started pissing
In the guitar player's cup:

We tried to catch wind
Of the wars
Like a fly in a book
And those who believed
They were still dreaming

In the old days a man chewed a match
And thought
About his death like a woman

He told his son to quit drinking
He told him to see the priest

He marked his bottle like a beetree
And he wanted his wife
To stay quiet in bed

He dreamed of the rains a good bull
And his daughter
Coming in late at night
Holding her shoes
In her fingers

He stared at the fire
Waiting for the voice of his best friend

He cracked open the window
And put sugar on the sill
Like the moon was an animal

The man counts to eleven and the pain comes
Again, no wonder all of them went crazy.

After all the beautiful and clever dreams
A man ought to be able to say nothing.

You can smell the dead bird, but not its song.

THE HOME MOVIE OF THOSE WHO ARE DEAD NOW

IN THIS HOUSE

They go to sleep at the big table.

They doze off working,
Teaching french, castrating horses,
Putting up preserves, polishing silver,
Whatever the ledger says they owe for.

They drift off with rags in their hands,
Spoons and switches and hoes.

Not too long ago I sat on a pop bottle case
And got a conch job, dreamed
Baby Gauge and I were following
The long spikes of a hundred pound flathead cat.

We were on a cottonwood raft,
Had carbide lamps
And a heart that was still beating for bait.

This was in Parither Brake, what some
Call Panther Burn at Luna landing,
Where he held the light, and I held the spear,
Where he held the spear, and I held the light,
Where we all dreamed the cold sleep and wake
Of the black fish moving under us,
And we had the rest of the camp
Dreaming with us, like a prayer meeting.

None of us told the truth, we didn't lie.

We found shirts with numbers on the back
In canebrakes, we found wristwatches on bones.
We looked for bootlaces.

When it rained, we changed our names,
Something bloomed in the eye.

The mosquitoes got drunk
And laid out on the moon's lounge.
So we stuffed light bread
Through the holes in the screendoors.

A wild horse, a new tool, an eaten melon

Full of rainwater and tadpoles.

Things loom up right odd,
Like a dark truck with hay, a room
The wind blew out of a tree,
Room for the voices and bodies
We hoped for, a woman putting jars
Over seedlings.

The draperies are pulled apart
Like a bone under the table
And the wet fields give pleasure.

Forget everything but the dining table
Where he went to sleep
Polishing a silver platter,
His head on it, shadow in a clean mirror,
Feathers from another country in a vase:

A nine-year-old girl is driving
A team of mules down every road,
Hauling a coffin of honeybees.

Every soul hears a bee in their window,
And the lips won't move.

The ones without men are carrying
Portraits of men
Up and down the stairs.

Hats blow down the road like dandelions.

THE BOY WHO SHOT WEATHERCOCKS

At first I did it with a shotgun,
But that blew out windows,
And went through chests
Full of dead peoples' clothes
In the attics.
It would wake people up
And I had to run through the woods
Swallowing cold weather
A fish hook at a time.
Now I do it from the windmill with a rifle.
I like it best in the spring
When the fields are smokmg
And the flies are thick.
I don't kill them, I just knock them off
The iron branches of the houses,
And they fly off, ahead of the bullet even,
Until they see the first cemetery,
Then they light, feed themselves
On the dark earthworms of shade,
Then they swoop over orchards, mess
On the lovers, then they are far away,
Such a distance a cripple like me
Can't imagine, man, then they are gone,
Laying their cold eggs all over the sky,
Rid of the wind.

MORE BISCUITS

He took a match out of his mouth
And sucked some old meat
From between his teeth.

He didn't spit nothing on the ground,
He swallowed it.
He struck the match on the side of his pants,
Threw it in the yard
And let it burn.

There awhile, he soaked his feet.
Then he picked up and left,
Went off down the road
With his bucket of Delta brand dark syrup.

A MILK TRUCK RUNNING INTO A CRAZY MAID AT THE CORNER OF GETWELL AND PARK

They pull a coat over an old woman's eyes.
They ask one another who the old woman was.
No one knows but she worked every day
And was carrying a sack
Of newspapers and a carton of eggs.
So they say what happened
And someone says she got up
Off the bench and shouted,
When a cow drinks water we get milk
When a snake drinks water we get bit.
She lifted her white dress
And waded out into the intersection
Like it was a river.
They lick their thumbs, write down what is told.
The other maids are getting off work
Standing around wondering what got into her.
The cats from Memphis State are sitting on the bench
Talking about the new Ornette Coleman album
Waiting for the bus,
And the servants of the people are pulling out of parking lots
And into their driveways,
A beer in their lap
Smoke from a dead cigar in their eyes
And desire and desire and desire
Like a long way to go in a bad war,
So they eat a big supper tell everyone what to do
Send the children to bed early have words with their wife.
They set the clock and lie back in the sheets.
They think of toes being slit
And blood that can be heard like a bad tap.
They draw their coats over an old woman's eyes
And think about standing in a warm pool
A white sheet wrapped around them
An old woman holding them
Taking them down into water.

ISLAND FUNERAL

Mama Julinda is let down into a hole
Her sons have to dig minutes ahead
Of time or the water will rise up
And make a channel around her,
And then it would be like having
Bad dreams, standing in a circle on the bank,
Throwing shovels of dirt at a boat.
The oldest is wearing a new blue suit.
It shines for night, like a fish.
The white gloves he had to cut the arms from
Are a tad soiled, like gardenias
After you touch them, and there's dust
Glowing on his long-toed shoes.
He's breaking the seal
On the bottle, breaking the law,
Drinking untaxed whiskey, the oldest
Son taking a deep, stiff drink,
And the grease on his head runs down
His temple, and everybody is going
To the glove compartments of their cars,
Like acolytes for their pints,
While the goat is turned and burned,
Deep in the moon of the delta,
An island funeral
Where days passed like a barge,
Around us many stars sinking in their light.

THE HOME MOVIE OF THOSE WHO ARE DEAD NOW

Fourteen years ago a Negro
Rode into town on a one-eyed mule
He had a long coat on
It was midnight blue

A woman was telling another woman
With sign language
In the honky-tonk near the river

I went to sleep with a catfish
Under my bed
A dog licked my toes

The chauffeur combing his hair
With a red comb

The bride shading her eyes
Like a run-over hawk's wing
Imbedded in the macadam

And the host blowing out of the priest's fingers
At the Morning Worship
Celebrated out in the garden

Mule in the ditch
A man afoot

Boats cutting through pure dark

Nobody hearing the deaf and dumb children
Burning wasps under the bridge

My mother changing a tire
For Martin Luther King's father

White gloves for the pallbearers
Cold drinks for the rest.

WHY THE MOON IS IN THE OUTHOUSE

We shall not all sleep
But we shall all be changed,
It says in the Bible somewhere.

When I was young I didn't owe any doctor bill.
Now they send me statements, special delivery,
Envelopes of X-rays I hold up to the moon,
The cancer swimming up my guts like tadpoles.

In the orphanage the other boys would
Put minnows in my underwear.
I wouldn't wake up.
I would dream about a green cat.

A wealthy lady loved the cat.
She gave money to the Church.
The priest told her she could love the cat.

Her chauffeur would drive up,
Get out, and light his cigarette.
This was the signal the lady wanted the cat.
One night the cat said I could go with them.

We drove through the delta in a black Cadillac.
In those days people asked why do fools fall in love
And they called the place we went niggertown.

There was a blind man out front of a juke joint.
He sold red carnations.
The cat always bought a flower for the lady.

You had to say the password
And the blind man knocked on a door with his cane.

The cat did all the talking.

All hell broke loose when they opened the door.
Everybody was carrying on.

There was a waiter who could dance
With a silver platter
Balanced on his finger.
He brought me a pop.

I told all the people I wasn't spoken for.

The cat and the lady went into another room.
I could hear them throwing their dough
Against the boards, making their bread.
I could smell the blind man behind me.
He said he wasn't blind, he was hypnotized.
I drank soda and looked at his watch,
The waiter twirling the platter.

He said when he snapped his fingers
I would open my eyes.
I wouldn't remember the orphans,
The green cat or the lady.
I would be older, set in my ways,
Holding something black up to the light

BLUE YODEL A PRAIRIE

Whenever I think of the shadows
Two oranges cast on the piano
When the sun drives a horse mad in a dry spell
I think of Virginia Day
Hanging up sheets in her backyard
She has a pair of blue jeans and a brassiere on
Holding the prairie
With a clothes-pin in her lips
Her husband is putting a new coat of lacquer
On his canoe
He still wants to kill
Whoever it was stole his birddog
It's been a long time
Since I smelled new laundry
The days have gone into the ground
Like rainwater strangers wipe from their eyes
When they meet again
In these drinking places.

MEMORY IS LIKE A SHOTGUN KICKING YOU NEAR THE HEART

I get up, walk around the weeds
By the side of the road with a flashlight
Looking for the run-over cat
I hear crying.

I thlnk of the hair growing on the dead,
Any motion without sound,
The stars, the seed ticks
Already past my knees,
The moon beating its dark bush.

I take the deer path
Down the side of the hill to the lake,
Wade the cold water.
My light draws the minnows,
Shines through them, goes dead.

FollowinQ the shore
I choose the long way home
Past the government camping grounds,
And see where the weeds have been
Beaten down,
Hear the generator on the Winnebago purring.

The children of the tourists
Are under the wheels
Like a covered wagon.
They scratch in their sleep
Until they bleed.

When I get home
I drink a glass of milk in the dark.
She gets up, comes into the room naked
With her split pillow,
Says what's wrong,
I say an eyelash.

THE DEAD MAN'S FIDDLE

A long time ago
A stranger rode into town
On a stout white mule.

The same day my brother
Who was mad from birth
Took a notion to swim the river
After a blue luna moth
Taking its own kind of journey.

He must have thought
It was a butterfly.
He spent time in front of trucks
Stroking their radiators.

He was always getting lost,
Climbing bee trees,
And putting up angels in the barn.

I still think he pretended to die,
Because we all pretended to weep.

Some boys shooting marbles
Tended the man's ride for him.
He gave them instructions to bite its ear.

He went into the hotel
And got a room.

His upper lip looked like a hawk
Gliding in the distance,
Coming towards you.

He went into Big Woman's Supper Tent
And came back out
With a slice of cornbread,
Wrapped in a silk paisley scarf,
And a quart bottle of sweetmilk.

When I think of my brother
I think of a white sheet with a hole
Left out on the line overnight,
The fiddle-player drinking milk.

He ate and drank
On the boardinghouse porch,
His pocketwatch opened up like a mussel in the mud.

Evening shined and was quiet
As the blade of a broken-down bulldozer.

But he must have heard something
Drifting over the sharecroppers' dark fields.

The moon was swollen up Like a mosquito's belly.

That night I found him
Face-down in the river,
I don't know if he was
Drinking or listening.

The white mule had the fiddle
Harnessed to him, like a plow.

DEATH AND THE ARKANSAS RIVER

BETWEEN LOVE AND DEATH

I watched the woman in the room.
She moved in her misery
Like a pine in the wind.
I could hear the woman sweeping her floors,
Boiling roots, and drinking milk.
I could watch the woman
Turning the tap of her bath
Through the hole in the wall.
On the summer nights I whistled,
Wanting her to hear me.
She would look my way, sometimes,
With an apple core in her mouth.
Working late, overhauling her truck,
She would drink coffee and hum,
Go to sleep with grease on her fingers.
God I was crazy for not
Going to her door,
Tapping on her window,
Following her to the river
Where her dory grew wet like the moon.
A bird sick of its tree, I despair.
Leaves without wind, I lay
Damp and quiet on the earth.
She bled through the walls
Into my side of the house,
And they came with their lights
Asking did I know the woman,
And I said no, not I.

DREAMS OF A RIVER I WADED WITH OTHERS LONG AGO

She died in the river, she died stepping back
Into the shadows, she died under the bridge
With her pants down, she died with a tongue
In her ear and a dark cigarette in her lips,
She died like heat lightning and milo,
She died like snake doctors on the windshield,
She died in the spring in a dark house
With a storm, she died with her cats and saxophones,
She died with the dead niggerlilies
And the fan belt part number on the nail,
She died first like the wolf
Then the snow in her paperweight,
She died with toilet paper in the screendoor,
And she died with a flyswatter and she died like a window
That turns into a nrirror at nightfall, she died
With chow-chow and dead flies on the tablecloth,
She died without a hand
On her forehead, she died on the side of the road
In the arms of a stranger

WOULD YOU LIKE TO LIE DOWN WITH THE LIGHT ON AND CRY

My nights are like valleys
Where the night falls soon
And the mist rises early.

The work I do is not easy,
But it is not bad.

When the white barns of the afternoon
Are dark and quiet
With their wasps and snakes
I wonder why we lie to one another:

Spots on the aged
Are called little flowers of the cemetery,
On the young they are marks
Left by the teeth of beauty.

The dying
Clutch their genitals
And shake like trestles
When the locomotive of death passes by,
And lovers
Like their trains
In the trembling bridges of their beds.

When no one is looking
We touch the thin underthings
Of our death to our lips.

I remember my death
And I remember desire,
And they are not the same.

Nine months from tonight
A woman will be holding
Her belly in pain.

BLUE YODEL OF THE LOST CHILD

You're so dusty,
Like a nightgown
Thrown down from the attic.
Always late
And used to dark places
Like the beautiful white spider,
The moon.
What would I do with you,
Give you a fan
To spread in the theatre
When you're blind,
And have the wind
Make its legend at your back.
I've thought about letting you
Search for your death,
Dowse for yourself
With a forked stick,
But I keep waking up wet
With a twig of blood
In my lips.
I can't find you.
Now you're quiet,
Like a loaf of rising bread.
A letter to the condemned,
You came too late
Like the snow
Who calls you his wife now,
And your breasts will never be
Heavy with milk,
And your voice like an owl
On every fence post.

THE LUNATIC

Somewhere out there a craft is travelling
Through black and fmal space.

It is built of light wood
Darker than this desk.

The dead trees of silence
Spread their naked legs,

Lying to us
Through their teeth.

And so our senses lie,
Forming the capillary systems

Of night and the universe,
A still moon of fire

Like a willow near the water,
Or a quiet bed.

An ancient stone
Is following this ship,

Music
Like a weightless anchor

Of form and line
Caedmon's dream.

But we are deaf,
Timeless engineers of sleep,

Draftsmen of space
Designing tool sheds for death.

Listen,
All I know is this desk

Is a swarm of stars,
Tadpoles in orbit,

And Nothing on earth is solid.

Innocent blood

Passes between light and myself.
So far

As I know,
It has not risen,

It has not taken my life
Or a journey without me.

DEATH AND THE ARKANSAS RIVER

Walking from the killing place,
Walking in the mud,
The bootsoles leave little hexes in the kitchen.

One summer there was a place
Where everyone chewed dirt in their supper.

It was a place like an attic
With a chest of orchids pressed in books.
Men cleaned their fingernails
In the moonlight.

Death let a bid.

And while everyone was in hipboots
Looking out for Death's fork-lift
There was a shine on Death's loafers.
His poll tax was paid,
so was his light bill.

In the winter Death runs snow tires on his truck,
He makes long hauls at night.
Death pays the best wage,
He can keep in touch on his two-way,
He's paid all the Laws off

Death can afford whatever he wants.

If you listened to the ground, you'd hear
Thunder coming like a train on the tracks.
And Death would signal ahead
That the half-dollar you stole to flatten
You lifted from your father's eye.

Death dances a slow boogie.
Even the awkward can follow
Where he leads.

In my life Death has asked me
To trade dogs,
While others have asked me
How he combed his hair.

Every time Death gets a Cadillac
He wants to fight.
He wants to run the front door,
He wants cooking that will remind him of home.

If you try to forget
Death ties a string around your finger.
Regrets and warnings
To those who don't know what's cooking
When Death's bread rises
Out of its grave.

Death, for instance, was looking
To cold-cock my brother.
My brother thought he pulled a fast one.
He played the radio and drank whiskey.
He raised hell
With women already married.

Do you know anyone that's got the best Of Death?

Some say you can keep an eye
Out for Death,
But Death is one for fooling around.
He might turn up working odd jobs
At your favorite diner.
He might be peeling spuds.

Death is fond of the double-entendre.

I for one am reminded of butterflies,
Snow blowing off pines.

Death controls the journeys,
The fare and the gender,
And Death is around you
Like a lock and dam.

So don't let Death catch you
Listening to the ground, even a place
That sounds like home.
It could be Death
Would file a quitclaim deed.
Death holds a quiet title
To the land your loved ones walked.

Even if you couldn't hear
The Sound would carry
Like a truck on a bridge, like a flower
Given at a bail, a sound in place,
The tradewind called Death, gentle
As children in their night clothes
Fighting with pillows, so quiet
Not a soul is wakened.

THE LIGHT THE DEAD SEE

FIRE LEFT BY TRAVELLERS

Before in our lives we have all gone down
to some river or another
and spoken with those who don't often speak
we tell them about the black fumes of our dreams
roots smouldering and asleep
and the hammer hanging on the branch
and they go on sinking long nails
into their boat's damaged wood
they make a harbor out of anything
that will hold a rope for a night
they sit on buckets
near the water's circular ruins
eating fish cooked in wine
one has a belly and keeps young ducks under his shirt
one wears a beautiful scarf
he claims the moon is a liar
under the patch over his left eye
briars take over their boots
which took journeys without walking
half under water there's a chimney
driftwood and broken oars and lost lures
floating in the flue
the current drawing them up the fireplace like smoke
there it stands alone like a stone tree
the house having burned
before the river rose
before I walked down these levees
my father's long graves
which he raised like a pharaoh
I kept coming down them
holding both arms before me like a sleepwalker
holding out my hands
trying to warm them on campfires long gone
sod might as well have been snow
I looked down the steep slope of those days
a skier getting ready for a jump
I had things to say

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN CAME DOWN TO THE SAWMILL ONE FRIDAY EVENING

Hello, I'm a teacher from the school.
Is there a man by the name of Drusky works here?

He'd be over on the saw, lady.

Thanks, I've got some bad news for him.

The woman came over my way.
The sawdust was blowing in her eyes.
I cut the saw off
Just when she was yelling.

Are you...

I'm Drusky.

I'm sorry to break this to you
But a child of yours was killed today.

Which one?

Your girl.

What happened?

The schoolbus hit a chicken truck

Was it quick for her?

I don't know Mr. Drusky,
But the others said there wasn't even a mark.

What about the others? They're all fine.
Your child was the only death.

Was it anybody's fault?

We don't know.

I never lost one before.

I'm sorry Mr. Drusky,

I have to be going now.

She walked away.
I seen a light on the hill.
Trouble is, there ain't nobody home.
I took off the safety glasses.

Hey, lady, I called.
I'm proud you didn't come down here
With a whole lot of goddamn fancy talk.

She kind of smiled
And must have told the boys,
Because they all come over
And took off their caps.

Boogen said I guess you won't make it
Up to the dance hall tonight.

No, tell them I wontt be there.
And do explain
It ain't that I don't feel like singing,
It's just some others
Will be wanting my voice this evening.

The boss said I didn't have to show Monday
And handed me a fifty dollar bill.

I told them all
Let me remind you trouble will find you,
Nobody can ride shotgun on your love.

I took to that lady.
I was proud she didn't come down here
With all that goddamn talk.

THE NEIGHBOR'S WIFE

Four AM and she's still gone
But I'm not going to call.
It's not so bad, until just before morning,
When I see a truck driver
Take a smoke out of his lips
And throw it out the window
And I watch it go to pieces
All over the road.

TERRORISM

while my mother is washing the black socks
Of her religion,
I climb out of the washtub,
Stinking clean like the moon and the suds
In my ass,
The twenty she earned last week in my teeth,
My shoes and my pistol wrapped in my pants,
Slip off the back porch
And head down the road, buck naked and brave,
But lonely, because it's fifteen hours
By bus to the capital
And nobody will know
How it feels to nail down a heart
Black as tarpaper.
Mother, when you beat out my quilt tomorrow,
Remember the down in the sunlight,
Because I did not sleep there.
Remember, come evening, the last hatch of mayflies,
Because I won't.
They are evil, mother, and I am
Going to take it all out, in one motion,
The way you taught me to clean a fish,
Until all that is left is the memory of their voice,
And I will work that dark loose
From the backbone with my thumb.
Mother, the sad dance on fire.

ONLY ONE SET IN THE SINGER'S EYES

He got drunk looking at a woman from his past
And this is what he wrote down on a paper sack
In the tavern one night while I watched him:
Your body is a plantation
I worked on for seven years, all of them solid,
Deep in summer it's uncleared timber, backwater
Ditch and slough, the years of the bad-assed
Sax, the years of bad cotton, nights and crops
I went shares on, evenings with gars,
Lord God Almighty didn't it rain,
So long, say love, say night honey, pull
A stump, court with your crowbar,
The bedrooms like trembling bridges,
Like women holding mirrors in the spring,
And here I am, the snow all around me,
A match in my mouth, like the high water,
Crazy, sad, and dangerous, a log
Chain on your floor, what love
There was, bee on the rose, buried in the year
Book in the attic, common and pretended sleep,
No one loses their shadow because no one
Is a boat on a river without wind,
And there are screws on the window sill
Never will be sunken to hold a pane,
You can listen to the rain, you can lie
Yourself back into bodies you never
Touched, cruelty, cruelty, cruelty,
That's what I told her.

LIVING THE GOOD LIFE

There is only one locale for the heart
And that's somewhere between the dick and the brain.
I don't believe love is for chickenshits.
It's low, dark, and cold-blooded, like a cottonmouth.
Children are often involved. They stink
When they sprout in the garden of light,
And they stink mulching their way back down.
Cold-hearted women, work, madness, and death
Are the things separating the nuts from the shells.
Everything else is strictly a pile of shit-
Except for childhood, which we moon over
Because it smells to high heaven. So, go it
Alone. Solitude is a constellation:
People can't connect light anymore,
The only code they can break is darkness.
You can get a file in the heart
But you can't jimmy love -a woman once said
It'd take a shotgun to open my heart.
All the time I was on my knees in the bathroom
Crying like a fool. No one knows
How to love anybody's trouble, nothing will
Deaden the chiggers of pain sucking
Blood in your sleep -oh beautiful tree frogs,
Sonic in the nasty oil of evening, I love you,
Sounds by yourselves a star's life away.
But it doesn't mean a goddamn thing.
Death isn't cold, dark, and quiet.
It is a love letter written on an X-ray.
Better still, it's a manta ray
Squealing in your wife's drawers.
Is this where your will is kept?
What sleek doing is she dreaming of tonight?
How much money do you have in the bank?
Are your early years filed away
In another bureau under another name?
Ask me no questions, I'll still tell you lies,
My father would sing like a bull frog.
I thought my father was a flat-out wonder,
A faraway and constant stranger in my midst.
He wasn't even my father, the cuckold.
So do Lord help the bucket mouth son
Doing a job on doom and eating banana flips.
I for one leave the transcendence of language

To the auctioneers on the widows' steps,
And to the truck drivers with ears
Looking for the smoke on the road.
As for the snow that drifts ever
So silently into the eyes of children,
It is all full of shit from the north
And radiation from the west.

THE LIGHT THE DEAD SEE

There are many people who come back
After the doctor has smoothed the sheet
Around their body
And left the room to make his call.

They die but they live.

They are called the dead who lived through their deaths,
And among my people
They are considered wise and honest.

They float out of their bodies
And light on the ceiling like a moth,
Watching the efforts of everyone around them.

The voices and the images of the living
Fade away.

A roar sucks them under
The wheels of a darkness without pain.
Off in the distance
There is someone
Like a signalman swinging a lantern.

The light grows, a white flower.
It becomes very intense, like music.

They see the faces of those they loved,
The truly dead who speak kindly.

They see their father sitting in a field.
The harvest is over and his cane chair is mended.
There is a towel around his neck,
The odor of bay rum.
Then they see their mother
Standing behind him with a pair of shears.
The wind is blowing.
She is cutting his hair.

The dead have told these stories
To the living.